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**Informational society
and challenges to the identities:
education as a resource for people to
partecipate in the transformation?
The case of the older workers**

Outline of a Research

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FOREWORD

In the Spring of 2003 I spent three months at the Institute of Education (IoE) of the London University, to develop an initial outline of a research about training older workers on-line. What is presented here is the product of the feedback between my thinking and reading there, supported by a lively scientific community where interactions among colleagues were facilitated in many different ways. I would like to thank in particular Karen Evans, David Guile with whom I discussed in many occasions my ideas and Jane Hurry who provided group discussion on my research.

I owe also particular thanks to IRES for giving me the possibility of working in London.

The research is going on producing new material that will be published shortly.

It is my hope that publishing this first outline of the research could contribute to the debate around the implications of the social and economical transformations in the lives of people, through their activities and practices, among which I focus on training. In particular I want to study the transition of identity needed in a system in transformation.

In the first chapter the conceptual approaches that might be used to frame the discourse about training are discussed. The following two chapters firstly develop the research questions - with some preliminary remarks over methods of research - and then the discussion of why Piedmont could represent a relevant case to be studied to show the support of education in identity transition.





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INTRODUCTION

The age in which we are living is characterized by a high speed of innovation in the development of information and communication technologies and by the consequent changes in organisational aspects of the social and economic systems. The ongoing transformations seem deep, multiplex and pervasive, crossing the boundaries of the countries, regions, institutions, social groups and classes, involving and affecting the lives of people of whatever status, ages and conditions (Cesareo, 2000; Gallino, 2000).

One of the effects of the spread of the new technologies is an increase in communication all around the world, making the different national economies – more often than before – in direct competitiveness. This phenomenon – usually referred as globalisation – is bringing about a different convenience in the labour division in the world. In the most developed countries the old form of industrialism based on manufactures has rapidly contracted under the pressure of the increased competition from the emerging countries in the East and South of the world. This process is provoking deep transformation in the labour market, with the decrease of traditional jobs and an increase of new jobs in their form and content. The more developed economies abandon the manufacturing industrialism and transit to a new form of it based on knowledge. Castells terms the new emerging form of industrialism as *informational industrialism* (Castells, 2000), referring to “the attribute of a specific form of social organisation in which information generation, processing, and transmission become the fundamental sources of productivity and power.” (1996, p. 21).

Both types of changes (changes due to the transition from the old industrialism and changes intrinsic in the dynamic characteristic of the informational industrialism) challenge the identities and have strong impact on the lives of the workers, especially on those of the less skilled ones. The skills needed in the economies centred on informational factors of production are higher than in the one based on manufactures and – following the ongoing innovation – are continuously shifting and changing.

The transition that happens at a macro level has its correspondent transition in individuals' identities. The UE and the countries members are setting policies to widespread lifelong learning, to contrast the obsolescence of skills and to support the transition of the economic system from the manufacturing industrialism to the knowledge-based economy. The vocational training courses play a central role in providing workers of occasions of learning. The other important context in which workers learn is the workplace (Evans et al., 2002).

This study draws attention to the challenges to workers embodied in the transition from the manufacturing industrialism to the new form based on knowledge in Piedmont, as well as in the intrinsic ongoing changes in the informational industrialism.

The research looks at the role of vocational training in supporting transition among different jobs and/or skills in the case of older workers. The “mature” workers are one of the most challenged social groups by the occurring socio-economic transformation. They themselves are defined through a good deal of experiences accumulated along life and less prone to changes now. Moreover, their prevalent model of career expects for a fifty-year-old man to start planning retirement. Therefore there aren't yet relevant social norms supporting transition from work to learning in the late careers, as well as to new jobs and/or skills. More often the social norms for the late phase of the working life concern the transition towards retirement. There is maybe also a lack of opportunities to participate in the construction of the requested knowledge for work in their workplaces, a factor that could hinder the process of transition.



The case of older workers can highlight the elements implied in a transition in a more significant way than in the case of beginner-career where there are more social norms supporting the transition from school to work and from one job to another. It could be interesting to analyse the mid-careers, but in this case we can suppose that the identities are more willing to integrate new elements, while in the case of late careers the difficulties of reconstructing the Self deeper are much more evident.

Vocational training is not analysed as an isolated activity, but as a context related to other social contexts. As I clarify later, I adopt a socio-cultural stance that considers context in a dialectic relation with individuals. In particular, I consider social norms – in the environment of the individuals – and internal referentiality as sources of meaning and knowledge to be used and to be innovated to allow transitions, and the extension of participation in the production of knowledge in the workplace, as affording a more gradual transitions between different skills and/or jobs (Billett, 2002). Both processes are problematic in the type of transitions I analyse.

This research tackles the issue looking at older workers attending a vocational training course and following them over the duration of the course and after it. The aim is to identify what kind of transitions they are facing, how this affected their identities, knowledge and skills, which interactions with the different contexts in which they live (the role of social norms and the participation in the workplace), how these contexts are changing.

It has been chosen to conduct the study in a European region characterised by a shifting process from manufacturing to informational industrialism, with an advanced process of ageing and the need to increase the rate of employment of older workers, as it cumulates all the features that make the transitions more significant.

The research will put forward a new reconceptualisation of employability. The new informational industrialism is characterized by a continuously change in the demand of skills. It will argue that being employable in such a system is not just an issue of keeping updated and acquiring the new skills, but moreover it consists in being able to engage in opportunities to participate in the process of construction of new knowledge required in the workplaces. Such a way of keeping employability would allow gradual transitions, softening the negative sides that could come with continuous relevant challenges to the identities.



1. NOTES AROUND CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES TO FRAME THE ANALYSIS

1.1 *Informational industrialism and globalisation*

It has been widely acknowledged that at the turn of the twenty-first century many developed countries are experiencing two types of changes:

- The changes consequential of the transition from the old industrialism toward a new form of it, as a new mode of development of capitalism, sometimes called Informational industrialism;
- The changes – intrinsic of the Informational industrialism – consequential of the ongoing innovation in technology and knowledge.

The first type of changes has been attributed to a technological revolution, reshaping the material basis of the society (Castells, 2000). At accelerated pace, new forms of relationship between economy, state and society are emerging. The capitalism is still the mode of production but it has been restructuring itself since the 70s, when “it hit the wall of its built in limitations...” (Castells, 2000). According to Castells, no matter where, the process of restructuring capitalism presents common features. Frost summarises in six key points the characteristics – identified by Castells – of the new organisational forms:

“

1. they have shifted ‘from mass production to flexible production, or from Fordism to post-Fordism
2. ‘the crisis of the large corporation, and the resilience of small and medium firms as agents of innovation and sources of job creation’ (1996, p. 155)
3. [...] ‘new methods of management’ (1996, p. 157), these include ‘just in time’ methods, total quality management, the focus on team work and the development flat hierarchies, for example. Central to this aspect of globalisation is the changing relationship between management and workers
4. one feature of these changes is the emergence of a ‘multidirectional network model enacted by small and medium businesses’ (1996, p. 160) – this and other forms of networking are central to the information age
5. ‘the licensing-subcontracting model of production under the umbrella corporation’ (1996, p. 160) has also emerged as a feature of contemporary organisation
6. and finally, it follows that corporate strategic alliances are also central to the new organisational structure (1996, p. 162).” (Frost, 2000) (pp. 3-4).

According to Castells, the aims of the transformation of large scale organisations is in “to ensure both innovation and continuity in a fast changing environment.” (Castells, as quoted by Frost 2000, 4). Therefore they attempt to combine flexibility and co-ordination capabilities, so that the labour process takes on two main characteristics: “the ability to generate flexible strategic decision-making; and the capacity to achieve organizational integration between all elements of the production process”. (Castells, as quoted by Frost 2000, 4).

The organisations assume the informational mode of development when “the source of productivity lies in the technology of knowledge generation, information processing, and symbolic communication” (Castells as quoted by Frost, 2000). Changes are a central feature also in the informational industrialism for “what is distinctive to the configuration of the new technological paradigm is its ability to reconfigure, a decisive feature in a society characterised by constant change and organisational flexibility.” (Castells, as quoted by Frost 2000, 2). The fundamental



element in the productivity is the knowledge and the information now, not longer the energy sources as in the previous industrial development. Castells calls informationalism this new mode of development based “on technology of knowledge generation, information processing, and symbol communication”. In the informational society “Social changes are dramatic as the technological and economic process of transformation” (Castells, 2000).

Using these elements of change, I will analyse the situation of Piedmont, a European region, as an emblematic case of transformation towards new forms of social organisations, based on technologies and communications.

1.2 *The older workers*

The constant change and organisational flexibility characterising the informational society may affect the individuals in different ways, depending on their own personal histories, their own individual agency, and the life phase that they are crossing.

Dealing with the economic and social changes may be more difficult for workers that entered the labour market with strong expectations about their carrier and retirement. They thought of knowing the timetable of their life on the base on how the social organisation was defined when they entered the adult phase. The welfare state recognised to them rights of assistance and pension at the end of their working life. The rights that they thought were fixed forever are being modified and they are asked for working longer to face the ageing of the population and the decrease of the finance for the welfare state. Most of them are experiencing the delay of the retirement, without certainty about the time and the conditions of it. They are loosing the control of their lifetime. That set of rules representing the system of social security is changing not only for the new generations, but also for the old ones, introducing uncertainty in the lives of older people.

The working life span is drawing out under the pressure of policies that attempt to postpone the age of pension and lighten the system of pension overloaded by the increased expectation of life. The labor force needs to stay professional active longer than it usually happens now. At the same time the technological process is faster, the economy and the society become more and more informational, the globalisation increases the pressure on the enterprises to be strongly competitive, the rhythm of all these changes soars. The labour market moves towards more flexibility and the risk to lose one's own job has increased.

This represents another important change in the lives of the workers, challenged by the innovation of process in their workplaces, the development of new technologies and new management models. The pressure of the higher and faster process of competition can be felt by workers confined and threatening, for the direction of the development and transformation is not always clear. The case of older workers can show how crucial is the dimension of time in the age of informational industrialism, even in a more evident way when female workers are considered.

They all can be seen as specific group of contiguous cohorts with specific problems and needs, originating in their biographies, characterized by expectations, beliefs and experiences of the age in which they lived their youth and adulthood. They are now “mature” workers and persons, with a Self well defined through a good deal of experiences cumulated along their life. They are often parents, whose children are at school or about to enter the labour market, events they had thought belong to the youth phase. Now their identity is challenged by the innovations in a phase of life in which the dominant discourse is about to “relax”. On the contrary, under the pressure of a changing society, instead of thinking of retirement, they have to re-think about their plans and some of them are facing vocational training courses, aiming to maintain their employability.

Facing such a change has clearly an impact on the continuous individual process of keeping the self coherent and giving continuity to his/her own biography.



I turn now to the literature to detect conceptual tools to analyse the challenge to identities in the informational age. I start with the sociological analysis and then I will move to the most recent theoretical contributions from the educational field.

1.3 *Informational society and self*

As I refer to Castells to interpret the transformation occurring in the industrial developed countries, it is interesting to discuss his stance about identity. In fact, he considers identity as a central concept in the informational societies and as the most important organizing principle shaping it (Castells, 2000).

According to Castells, the raising power of the identity has been allowed by the institutional crisis caused by two phenomena, firstly by the transformation of capitalism and secondly by the emergence of a new global system.

The relationship between identity and the global network is seen as problematic, for “global networks of instrumental exchanges selectively switch on and off individuals, groups, regions, and even countries, according to their relevance in fulfilling the goals processed in the network, in a relentless flow of strategic decisions. There follows a fundamental split between abstract, universal instrumentalism, and historically rooted, particularistic identities. *Our societies are increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net and the self.*” (3) This separation is seen as deep and bringing about the phenomenon of social exclusion: “When the Net switches off the self, the self, individual or collective, constructs its meaning without global, instrumental reference: the process of disconnection becomes reciprocal, following the refusal by the excluded of the one-sided logic of structural domination and social exclusion.” (24).

Castells quotes Alain Touraine (1994) to point out how centrally is his view in the problem of the defense of the identity: “in the post-industrial society, in which cultural services have replaced material goods at the core of production, *it is the defense of the subject, in its personality and in its culture, against the logic of apparatuses and markets, that replaces the idea of class struggle.*” (translated by Castells, p. 22).

In Castells the relation between the Net and the self sees the latter dominated by the former, so that an idea of passivity surrounds in his work. Giddens – in his theoretical interpretation of our present-day world taking as starting point the question of the relation between the transformation of the modern institutions and the individual life – declares in an explicit way that the self is not passive:

“The self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences; in forging their self-identities, no matter how local their specific contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications.” (1991).

Clearly the issue faced by Castells and Giddens is about the relation between subjects and objects. The theory developed by Giddens take into account the effects of the individual actions on the social contexts, while Castells is more inclined to underline the power of the Net on the individuals. As I discuss later, I adopt the stance of interplay between subjects and objects. Therefore what Giddens’s work suggests as conceptual tools to analyze the interconnections between the self and the external global influences in the modernity can be useful to interpret the choice of attending a vocational course by the older workers. The most relevant concepts for the research presented here are described in the following.

- Lifestyle. In the high modernity there is a plurality of options and a diversity of ‘authorities’, so that the individuals are forced to build their own lifestyle. It is not possible not to have a lifestyle: “we have no choice but to choose.” (1991). “A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices



fulfil [sic] utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of the self-identity.” (1991). Lifestyles are linked with specific milieux of action, so that the individuals tend to feel uncomfortable in social contexts that question their habits and set of practices. The choice of work is part of lifestyle orientations.

- Reflexivity. The self constructs a reflexive project that “consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives ...” (1991). Through reflexivity, the self organizes a trajectory and a life-planning. “The self-identity becomes a reflexively organized endeavour.” (1991).
- Abstract systems. They are the combination of expert systems and symbolic tokens. The latter are media of exchange with standard value as the money. The multiple choices are filtered through abstract systems.
- Risk. Nowadays the concept of risk has become fundamental in how we organize the social world. Lay actors and technical specialists tend to control the future through a process of reflexive organization of the knowledge. They assess the risk of not obtaining the anticipated outcome. But no one risk assessment is perfect. In the high modernity this risk assessment becomes even more imprecise because the introduction of new high risk parameters. Therefore the high modernity is characterized by high-consequence risks “such as the collapse of global economic mechanisms, or the rise of totalitarian superstates ...” (1991), besides risks of ecological catastrophe.
- Reskilling. “Individuals are likely to reskill themselves in greater depth where consequential transitions in their lives are concerned or fateful decisions are to be made. Reskilling, however, is always partial and liable to be affected by the ‘revisable’ nature of expert knowledge and by internal dissensions between experts.” (1991).
- Internal referentiality. “The key reference points are set ‘from the inside’, in terms of how individuals constructs/reconstructs his life history.” (1991). As I interpret Giddens’s theorizing, the social norms seem losing influences on the individuals, as they create “a personal belief system by means of which the individual acknowledges that ‘his first loyalty’ is to himself.” (1991).
- *Umwelt*. This is a notion used by Goffman and refers to “a core of (accomplished) normalcy with individuals and groups surround themselves.” (1991). Giddens adopts this concept to analyze the selectiveness with which individuals react to the different sources of direct and mediated experiences to compose their own *Umwelt* (normalcy).

The debate in the literature over the economic transformation and the characteristics of the modernity so far analyzed doesn’t seem to be interested in theorizing different kind of Self and identities and their interactions with the changes in the social and economic context. Giddens provides some interesting conceptual tools to interpret the cultural and societal changes in the individuals’ lives, but he doesn’t examine the reciprocal changes between identities and social contexts. Furthermore there is any consideration of the age and the different phases of life and he doesn’t include in his analysis a gender perspective.

1.4 *Changes of self and learning*

In the last decades the debate about the link between economic development and education has received an important impulse by the increasing pressure of the globalisation phenomena on the occupational structures in the developed countries. National education and training systems are challenged by the request from the labor market of new skills for post-industrialism jobs. Reich’s work introduced the concept of education-led economic growth, and the concern that the fate of nations would have been determined by the education and training systems (Guile, 2001). The



ideas of “Learning society” and lifelong education are central in this debate (Guile, 2001) and, following them, a good deal of policies have been developed. Despite the emphasis put on permanent and continue learning through life, it subsists the problem that the acquisition of qualifications is not a guarantee of having capabilities required by the “knowledge economies” (Young, 1998). As Guile and Young point out, taking also in account Lash’s preoccupation of the need of new “rules” that assist individuals and communities, “individuals and communities will require fundamentally different type of ... ‘knowledgeability’ (i.e. combinations of knowledge and skill) compared with the types traditionally developed by national education and training systems.” (Guile, 2001). It is needed to relate workplace and formal learning, to learn how to use information and communication technology to produce new knowledge and how to develop a ‘transformative’ relationship with the world (Guile, 2001).

Therefore it is essential to rethink the process of learning going beyond the traditional approach based on the acquisition of pre-existing knowledge. The debate occurring in the educational psychology illustrates the limitations of this conception (Guile, 2001) and introduces fundamental questions to develop a broader view of what learning consists in. In particular it provides a recontextualisation of learning based on the relation between individuals and social organizations (Wertsch et al., 1995), theorizing processes of transition and transformation of knowledge, skill and identities (Beach, 1999).

Beach reminds that the boundaries of the educational phenomena are wide, and warn from the danger of shrinking the field by “confusing our conceptual tools with the phenomenon we are trying to understand”. His focus on the interrelated processes implying the continuity and the transformation of knowledge, skill and identities across various forms of social organizations is crucial for the research question of my research. Beach names this set of psychological and social processes as generalization, as an interpretive framework of the “generalization across the broader domains of human experiences with which education is ultimately concerned”. This framework is needed to understand the transfer across tasks and problems, viewed by Beach as a special case of the generalization phenomenon.

In the case of older workers attending vocational training the generalization – as transition of knowledge and skill, the changes in identity – is central. Generalization phenomena is constituted by a complex set of psychological and social processes, rather than a single procedure as the transfer of skill from one task to another implies (Beach, 1999). Therefore the theory that Beach has developed is useful to interpret the transition in which the older workers are involved, which appears far more articulated than just a process of transfer can be.

In the Beach’s framework it is provided also a conceptualization of the relation between persons and social contexts that takes into account the need of transformation and development of new knowledge and skills in the informational age, as well as the participation of the workers in the process of constructing new social contexts, in a dialectical reciprocal transformation between the Self and the context.

His stance goes beyond the behaviorism (focusing on environment), cognitivism (centred on psychological processes) and ontological separation between persons and environments (Salomon and Perkins, 1998), all of these approaches being refractions of Platonic stance in which individual and world are separated (Beach, 1999). The limit of these approaches is that “reflects a functionalist epistemology in which progress is marked by adaptation to and acceptance of existing social conditions ...” (Packer in press quoted by Beach, 1999).

To understand “continuity and transformation in learning as an ongoing relation between changing individuals and changing social contexts” (Beach, 1999) it is postulated that:

“Individual and contextual agency for transfer are not ontologically independent of one another. At the same time, the role of individuals is not reduced to that of social context, nor is the role of



the social context reduced to a group of individuals. To paraphrase Cole (1996), our distinctiveness as humans lies in our ability to modify our world through the construction of cultural artifacts in texts, technologies, symbols, and signs, along with our corresponding ability to reconstruct the modifications in subsequent generations through schools, families, communities, and work. We thus transform our own learning and development.” (Beach, 1999).

This stance is consistent with a Buddhist ontology of experience, “the experience of continuity and transformation across social contexts that emerges from changing relations between persons and contexts.” (Beach, 1999). The Buddhist philosophy states the dependent origination:

“Rather than locating knowledge within individuals, as did Plato, or its opposite, the world, dependent origination allowed continuity in knowledge and identity to result from an interdependence of different systems of phenomena, such as persons and social contexts. Thus, our experiences of continuity across time and context are a function of neither the individual nor the context but their dialectical relation (Dudjom Rinpoche, 1991).” (Beach, 1999).

Using the expansion of the phenomenon of education (generalization) and adopting the stance based on the interplay between individuals and social contexts, Beach goes beyond the concept of transfer and offers a reconceptualization of it as ‘consequential transition’ among social activities. A transition is consequential when is “consciously reflected on, often struggled with, and the eventual outcome changes one’s sense of self and social positioning.” (1999, 114). Among the types of transitions that he identifies to express different forms of relations between individuals and social activities, the following ones will be used to detect the transitions experienced by the older workers:

- Collateral transition: occurring when an individual participate in two or more historically related activities (e.g. between school and home);
- Encompassing transition: happening within the boundaries of an activity that is itself changing (e.g. because a reform has been set up or new machines have been introduced);
- Mediational transition: involving educational activities that provide simulation of activity which the individual is progressively moving towards (e.g. vocational and adult education).

Each transition potentially implies “the continuity and/or the transformation of knowledge, skill, and identity embodied in the relation” (Beach, 1999).

Beach suggests a methodology based on the evolutionary theory to asking the appropriate questions, able to generalize the phenomena of learning. Referring to the work of Varela, Thompson, Rosh and Maturana, he sees the development process embodied in the transitions as a coevolution process of the individuals and the environment, where the relationship between the two systems change over time in a structural and developmental coupling (Beach, 1999). However when in presenting each type of transition he refers to societal notion of progress, he leaves open the interpretation of what it means societal progress. In particular, it is not clear if he thinks that the societal progress correspond to the development coupling.

Beach doesn’t deepen inside into the evolutionary approach and its implication for the human mental functioning. In fact evolutionary psychology would add strength to his position as well specify better the implications of an evolutionary view in the studies of learning process (Barkow, Cosmides, Tooby, 1992).

Considering the environment in the developmental coupling means to address the issue of what activate individuals perceiving and acting. Billett’s work on what shapes how individuals elect to



engage in workplaces provides some insights in it (2002). Billett calls attention to the norms and the values of the workplaces and to the distribution of opportunities to participate. He argues that they are fundamental to understand the learning experiences of workers. Individual agency has also an effect to explain the engagement in work practice.

This focus on workplaces as a social context where workers learn through a participatory process is a contribution to the interpretation of the choice made by the older workers to attend a vocational training course. It is possible to suppose that workers invest in training because their needs are not fulfilled in the workplace.

The Billett's analysis points out also the participation needs in order to "remain engaged with the changing requirements for practice." (2002, 65). A lack of participation may increase the difficulty of workers in facing transformation, making transitions and keeping their knowledgeability updated.

So far the socio-cultural approach doesn't offer enough conceptual tools to analyze the transformation in workers' identities. Moreover the issue of transitions has not been analyzed in the light of the gender prospective, supposing that there are not differences in the way women and men experience transition. Further theoretical contributions are needed to frame it.

1.5 *Gender and identities*

Contributions from the psychology of development give references to interpret the female and male identities and the way in which women can experience transitions. In the psychological framework I find also ways of analyzing developmental transition.

Gilligan, in her work on *Psychological theory and women's development*, reviewing contributions from developmental theorists, associates the formation of the identity of men with separation and individuation and the women's with connection and relationship (Gilligan, 1993). This difference in developing identities brings about two ways of approaching the others. The former is more oriented towards independence, preserving the integrity of the Self, the latter is linked with the issues of care.

Gilligan reports that "in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, the dilemma itself is the same for both sexes, a conflict between integrity and care. But approached from different perspectives, this dilemma generates the recognition of opposite truths. These different perspectives are reflected in two different moral ideologies, since separation is justified by an ethic of rights while attachment is supported by an ethic of care." (164). Both identity's developments face difficulties in coping with what is not developed so that:

"Since masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment, male gender identity is threatened by intimacy while female gender identity is threatened by separation. Thus males tend to have difficulty with relationships, while females tend to have difficulty with individuation." (8).

For the women it means that often they mask desire and avoid conflict by equivocation to secure relationships (164). I will use this reference to interpret women narratives in case of appearance of difficulties in recognise "the locus of responsibility and truth" (164).

From the accounts reported by Gilligan, the gender differences turn out to hinge the way in which women deal with competition and success. In competitive achievement situations they approach success with anxiety caused by the conflict between hope of success and fear of success for the negative consequences they expect to follow it (15). Gilligan follows the interpretation of Sassen



suggesting that, when the success is made on the expense of another's failure, the conflict might indicate "a heightened perception of the 'other side' of competitive success, that is, the great emotional costs at which success achieved through competition is often gained ..." (Sassen as quoted by Gilligan, 15). It is also interesting to note that Chodorow's analysis – referred by Gilligan – concludes that "men's social orientation is positional while women's is personal" (16). This point can be contrasted with the Beach's claim that one of the consequences of transition is a change one's sense of social positioning. If it is true that women are more orientated towards consideration of relationships rather than social position, then the Beach's definition of 'consequential transition' appears to be male centered. To take into account the way in which women construct the reality, a consequential transition could be one that brings about changes in one's sense of self, social positioning *and personal relationships*. As, according to Gilligan, women "judge themselves in term of their ability to care" (17), it would be worth to look at the changes in the way women deal with activities of care.

Another point relevant for the research presented here emerges from Gilligan's work about female identity and rules, where it appears that women are more flexible and innovative in order to preserve relationships. This can be understood also in the light of her stance about female ethic of care and male ethic of rights.

"While women [...] try to change the rules in order to preserve relationships, men, in abiding by these rules, depict relationships as easily replaced." (44).

Although this stance seems strong, it could indicate a possible difference between women and men in dealing with rules. On the other hand, this type of difference appears clearly in the ways boys and girls play games in the middle childhood, so that they reach the adolescent phase with very different perspectives about the importance of rules compared with the one of relationship. Since the theorists of human development agree about gender differences in the formation of identities, therefore it is possible that in the adulthood the sexes maintain differences also about how to deal with rules. The analysis of success reported above seems to confirm this possibility. I will consider this stance in interpreting the data.

Turning to the central issue of the research, I point out Gilligan's claim that when life transitions imply experiences of attachment or separation women are involved in a distinctive way.

"In view of the evidence that women perceive and construe social reality differently from men and that these differences center around experiences of attachment and separation, life transitions that invariably engage these experiences can be expected to involve women in a distinctive way." (171).

The literature about vocational courses usually doesn't take into account interdependence between attending courses and activities of care, in other words how attending a course can affect activity of care and vice versa. Therefore I can only suppose that attending vocational courses could imply, especially for women, a consequential transition involving transformation in relationships and activities of care. However the observed absence of consideration about relation between training and activities of care seems just another form of what Gilligan's analysis sees as split between love and work. She points out that such a split reflects a conception of adulthood – centered on masculine identity – out of balance "favoring the separateness of the individual self over connection to others, and leaning more toward an autonomous life of work than toward the interdependence of love and care." (17).



Even if the Gilligan's analysis of transition has psychological aims, it is interesting to note that she uses "the magnification of crisis to reveal the process of developmental transition [...]. In doing so, I draw on the work of Piaget (1968) in identifying conflict as the harbinger of growth and also the work of Erikson (1964) who, in charting development through crisis, demonstrates how a heightened vulnerability signals the emergence of a potential strength, creating a dangerous opportunity for growth, "a turning point for better or worse" (139)." (107-108). On this ground, I might begin to ask not only which kind of consequential transition workers experience, but also if the development is accomplished through crisis and conflicts and if it has moved the individual toward a more satisfactory situation or less.

According the literature on women and work, it is possible to argue that one of the main conflicts that women are experiencing in professional working is the conflict between time devoted to the paid work and time devoted to the family. A feeling of guilt affects them for the concern not to care enough after the children especially. Therefore it is possible to detect the same type of conflict also between attending a course and the care of the family, a conflict that could appear even strengthened in case of the workers for the co-presence of work, training, and family activities. Women in older age, as also Gilligan notices, could undergo a change in the structuring of care, but some tensions among the main activities they perform might be expected.

More generally, the research will detect which kind of conflicts the socio-economic changes bring about to the individuals, how individuals manage the conflicts, and which outcomes comes from the interplay in term of modification of the self and the environment.

Combining the Beach's conceptualization of development (developmental coupling between individuals and social contexts) with the Gilligan's one (development through conflicts and crises), I define as development any occurring coherent set of changes as long as it is a response to a tension between the individual and the context.

Having discussed the gender perspective, it is now possible to re-read also the contribution of Giddens. In particular, the conceptual tools listed above need to be reviewed to explicit the feminine element in the modernity that could be also seen as the age of the women emancipation. The changing role of the women in the last century has a substantial part in the multiplication of lifestyles. The increased – even if still partial – participation of women in the social life is linked with the breaking of the patriarchal system. On the ground of Gilligan's work, such participation should bring about the feminine contribution to the institutional reflexivity in terms of sensitivity towards relationships, care and nature.

The research will adopt the Giddens's contribution and the gender perspective to analyze the cultural and societal changes in Piedmont.



1.6 *New technology of communication and new pedagogy*

The widespread of new technologies of communications in the informational industrialism has involved also the educational system. The diffusion of them, together with the increased participation of adults in the learning activities and the development of the constructivism school of thought, has challenged the traditional settings of teaching and learning. Adult learners are characterized by a high level of motivation and a relevant attitude toward self-directedness (Brookfield, 1986). Their participation in training courses is increasing as long as the lifelong learning mainstream influences the culture of the society. The new technologies of communication could support this augmented demand of learning (Trentin, 1998). On the other hand the constructivism provides conceptual tools to develop methods of learning adapt to respond to the needs of adult learners. This theoretical perspective points out the important role of social interactions in learning. In fact these factors combined with the types of possibilities enabled by the new technologies of communication and information have brought about a development of cooperative and collaborative methods of structuring the learning activities, applied in particular in e-courses (Trentin, 1998). Therefore the latter represent a social context in which the participants are involved in mutual engagement. Moreover the learning activities might be carried in different contexts (workplace, home, training centre) providing proximities and interconnections among them, and challenging the split work/care theorised by Gilligan. Hence e-learning can set optimal conditions to study processes of reflexivity, co-construction of knowledge and identities, and relations between work, training and care activities.



2. THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research tackles the issue of transition in the case of older men and women workers and the support received attending a vocational training course. The aim is to identify:

- Which conflicts are raised by the innovations in the socio-economic system in the life of the workers and how the workers intend to face them through the vocational course; the correspondence of possible differences between women and men to the categories of separation, intimacy, individuation and relationships, and split work/care described on Gilligan's theory;
- The weight of social norms compared with the weight of internal referentiality in structuring perceiving and actions about training in older age; the way that given social norms afford the process of transition in older age, while others may hinder it, looking at different social contexts in which the workers are involved (family, workplace, community, friends); noticeable differences between women and men linkable to the theorized gender approach to rules;
- The affordance in the workplaces in activating the workers' participation in the construction of the required knowledge for work and the role of it in the choice of attending a vocational training;
- The type of consequential transitions the workers experience attending a vocational training course, using critically the typology proposed by Beach. The workers are involved in different activities (work, school, family, community) and therefore it is possible to find a complex entwined set of transitions;
- How the transitions involve - through reflexivity and change in the narrative of the self - their identities, relationships, skills, and knowledge;
- How they co-construct the identity and the knowledge with the others (participants of the course, partner, friends, colleagues);
- The level of satisfaction about the outcome of the transitions.

The semi-structured interviews seem to be the more appropriate methods of research. Since the focus of the research is on transition, I interview the workers at the beginning, during and after the training vocational course. I return to interview them also 6 months after the end of the course, to have a deep insight about the significance of the experience of the course.

For the theoretical perspective doesn't privilege the point of view of the individuals, and focus on the reciprocal changes between individuals and contexts, I interview also the other actors involved in the scenes: teachers, tutors, the family, and colleagues in the workplace.

In these scenes I represent an element of reflexivity for the actors involved, and my interventions can modify the performance of workers in the transition. I will try to understand in which way my interactions impact on their reflexivity, however my main interest is to focus on the reciprocal changes and how transitions develop. Even if my presence on the scene can influence the performance of the workers in the transition, I think that it is not going to change the dynamic in a substantial way. If then it appears that it impacts in a significantly way, I will interpret it as an indication of the role of external actors in inducing reflexivity and enhance transition.

According to the framework of the research, I regard as part of the interplay between the individuals and the contexts "the construction of cultural artifacts in texts, technologies, symbols, and signs ..." (Beach, 1999). So I examine the materials of the course and the documents, texts of



different types elaborated by the participants of the course, as well as possible other documents circulating in the workplace about issues concerning training, transition, changes, knowledge for work, relevant for the research questions.



3. GLOBALISATION AND LOCALISM: THE PIEDMONT CASE

Piedmont faced the first important sign of globalisation impact on its social-economic system at the beginning of the 80s, when FIAT introduced relevant innovation of production and management to cope with international competition. The negotiation among the corporation, the trade unions and the government ended up in moving towards an earlier retirement thousands of workers. The social impact of that crisis was large and deep for the centrality of FIAT in the Piedmont's economic production. Since then, it has been clear that the regional system would not longer be competitive in the traditional manufacturing worldwide sector and that the diversifications were required. The tertiary sector has been developing and now in Piedmont about 58% of the labour force is employed in it. The local government and social forces have been supporting investments in high-tech infrastructures of communications and advanced business services according to a vision of Piedmont as a region with potentiality for playing high functions in the division of production among the European regions. In fact the export of business services is relevant and has increased in the last decades. Other economic features could show that Piedmont has some significant strength in supporting the technological revolution in Italy. The technological evolution in the mechanical production – in which FIAT has played an important role – has produced a high technological knowledge in Piedmont.

However since the 80s FIAT has reduced its importance in the Piedmont's economic system. Its transformation is still on and hasn't reached a stable status. The occurring debate is about whether the production of cars in Piedmont will cease soon and with which impact on the regional system. It is argued that if FIAT needs to reduce further its labour force, it is necessary to avoid putting the workers in an earlier retirement. Two factors hinder this transition now: the national policies prone to control the expenditure of the pension system and the decrease of young population in Piedmont. The latter – due to a very low fertility rate in the last twenty years – is quite relevant and is affecting the labour market provoking shortage of young labour force and therefore tensions between supply and demand. Most of the enterprises are still inclined to look for just young people, but they are experiencing difficulties to find them. On the other hand there is an increasing sensitivity by the employer associations to suggest that it should be considered with more attention the knowledge and experience cumulated by the less young workers and that early retirement risk to be a waste of human resources.

This type of issues is clearly linked to the phenomenon of ageing. Italian regions are facing the most advanced process of ageing in EU: Eurostat identifies Italy as the most aged and 'dejuveniled' country (Eurostat, 2000). Piedmont is the fifth region in EU for the highest percentage of over 60 years old and the sixth for the lowest percentage of population less than 20 years old (IRES, 2002). The other regions with higher level of ageing are all Italian, most of them from the Centre of Italy. Piedmont is the most aged region among the most economically developed regions in Italy.

The concern about the effect of ageing on the social-economic regional system is widespread now. Opinion leaders point out the risk of supporting a technological development with an ageing labour force, while at the same time the skills undergo obsolescence, due to the fast technological development. Therefore it is stressed the importance of lifelong learning by most of the institutional actors. In fact the training sector is in expansion, corroborated by funding provided by the European Social Fund. In the last years then the regional government has supported the development of e-training to widespread the opportunities of vocational training. The vocational training held up by the enterprises is instead in decline, affected by the cutting down costs strategy. Such a feature could appear in contrast with the occurring social and economic trends in Piedmont.



Piedmont is a region in transition from an economy based on manufacturing and mechanical sectors towards an economy based on knowledge, technology and communications. A significant portion of the regional system is already centered on the new sectors, and a large part of the society presents forms and characteristics typical of a post-industrial phase. The process of ageing – especially the one concerning the labour force – can hinder the progress of the transition. Therefore it is a strategic issue to consider how older workers can experience the transition and how education can support them in it.



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